



South Carolina River News



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River Management

A Perspective on Recreational Use of South Carolina Rivers

by Dr. William Norman, Director,
Clemson University Recreation, Travel, and Tourism Institute

Being from Northern Minnesota and working for three years as a tourism marketing specialist for the University of Wisconsin, I am very familiar with the importance of lakes to the recreational and aesthetic needs of a state's citizens and visitors. In my years in the upper Midwest, I was able to observe a dramatic shift in vacation patterns from the traditional week-long stay at a "mom and pop" fishing resort to the "long weekend" at a new motel or hotel in a nearby community. While many factors may have lead to this shift in recreation and travel behavior, I believe that one of the most significant reasons for this change was an increased interest in water-based activities other than fishing such as canoeing, sailing, wind surfing, and kayaking.

Upon my arrival to South Carolina in 1995, I quickly found that going to "the coast" was the major attraction for leisure and vacation travel. As I began to learn more about the state, I realized that much like the lakes in the upper Midwest, the rivers of South Carolina are held in high regard for their role in the state's history, commerce, and recreation. I also learned of a fledgling sector of the state's tourism industry that has recognized the value of rivers to leisure travelers and the state's economy. Capitalizing on the vacationer's interest in the environment, wildlife, history, education, and adventure, a combination of small entrepreneurs, corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations is in the process of telling the world about the rivers of South Carolina. As a result, rivers have become an important part of the state's nature-based tourism industry.

In my travels throughout the state in the last year, I have had the opportunity to meet many of the individuals and groups working to promote the recreational use of South Carolina's rivers.

Their dedicated efforts have resulted in a wide variety of opportunities from whitewater rafting to canoeing to nature study and bird watching. These groups are also busy at planning for and protecting river corridors and educating people about the value (aesthetic and economic) of the state's rivers. Notable examples include Kiawah Island resort, famous for world class golf, that has also developed an innovative experiential education program; Wildwater Ltd. which provides rafting opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities on the National Wild and Scenic Chattooga River; and Salt Marsh Expeditions which offers kayak trips in the Lowcountry.

I have also had a chance to learn about a nonprofit organization that has helped make South Carolina's rivers nationally recognized. According to *Canoe and Kayak* magazine, the Edisto River is one

of the top 61 rivers in the United States for paddle sports. Much of the credit is due to the Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Commission for their hard work. Not to be outdone, Columbia, South Carolina was recently named by *Paddler* magazine as one of the top river towns in the United States. This recognition is largely a result of the local outfitters and paddling community and their dedication to protecting and utilizing the Saluda and Congaree rivers.

Who is taking advantage of the many recreational opportunities on South Carolina's rivers? According to the recently released *South Carolina Recreation Participation and Preference Study Technical Report* prepared for the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism, 7.5% of South Carolina residents 12 and older went canoeing, kayaking, or rafting in 1994. This was a slight increase from the 6.9% of South Carolinians who participated in 1990. The majority of paddlers reported that their last outing was on a whitewater (40.8%) or flatwater river (39.1%). The remainder of the paddling activity occurred on lakes (14.4%) and coastal areas (4.0%). Paddlers averaged six outings in 1994. Just over one-half (51.3%) reported paddling in South Carolina on their last trip. The most popular regions for

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Enjoying the Edisto River

River Organizations

Paddling Experts Form Professional Organization

by Richard Mikell, SC Professional Paddlesport Association

The South Carolina Professional Paddlesport Association (SCPPA) is a nonprofit organization for canoe and kayak outfitters and guides. Since 1993, the group has grown from only three to more than twenty members. This growth is in direct proportion to increased public demand for use of the state's waterways for paddling.

Guiding principles of the SCPPA are: 1) To preserve the natural resources and free enterprise system upon which the paddling business is dependent; 2) To protect the safety of the paddling public by providing safe, high quality services, equipment, and facilities; and 3) To promote education in boating safety and paddling skills. The Association requires all members to adhere to a rigid set of standards designed to encourage professionalism.

The SCPPA membership includes a diverse group of professional outfitters from across South Carolina. Member outfitters offer trips on more than 25 rivers around the state from sea kayaking on the Combahee to canoeing on the Black to whitewater rafting on the Chattooga. They also rent equipment to those who prefer to create their own paddling experience.

Periodic meetings of the Association are held at various outfitter locations. The meetings usually

begin with a short paddling trip and a tour of the outfitter's facilities followed by a supper where the host outfitter showcases his culinary specialties. Afterwards, the group gets down to business addressing such topics as marketing, risk management, and river cleanups.

A monthly newsletter keeps members up-to-date on meetings, upcoming events, and other items of interest.

Recent activities of the SCPPA include sponsoring a class on how to train guides as well as publishing and distributing a brochure describing some of the paddling opportunities in South Carolina. Future plans call for an annual paddling exhibit and used equipment sale.

All paddling outfitters in the state are invited to join the SCPPA if they subscribe to the Association's high standards. For more information (or for a free copy of the Paddlesport brochure), write Adventure Carolina, 1107 State Street, Cayce, SC 29033. ■

Recreational Uses continued from page 1

canoeing, kayaking, or rafting in South Carolina were the Lowcountry (19.9%), the Appalachian region (17.7%), and the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester area (15.7%).

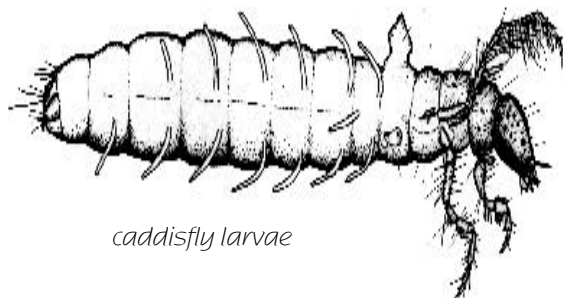
There is an information gap with regard to non-resident river use. Further information about the size of this market segment is especially important since nature-based tourism marketing and promotion is often aimed at attracting people to South Carolina from surrounding states. This additional information is needed by river managers, community and regional organizations, tourism businesses, and nongovernment organizations if they are to ensure that river usage does not exceed physical and social carrying capacities with the ultimate outcome of overcrowding and environmental degradation.

It is my belief that nature-based tourism in South Carolina has the potential to be a successful rural economic diversification strategy that encourages sustainable development through environmental stewardship. Specific benefits of nature-based tourism to river users include satisfying outdoor experiences, increased knowledge about river environments, a change in attitudes and beliefs toward river resources, and the encouragement of appropriate behavior in natural settings. Nature-based tourism also has the potential to minimize disturbance to sensitive natural environments, improve and increase the protection of river resources, and contribute to the long-term health and viability of watersheds. ■

River Naturalist

Aquatic macroinvertebrates have three distinct characteristics: they live in the water, they do not have a backbone, and they can be seen with the unaided eye. Examples include aquatic insects, crayfish, mussels, snails, and worms. **Scientists can predict water quality by looking at the macroinvertebrate community of a river.** For instance, some organisms such as mayflies,

stoneflies, and caddisflies are very sensitive to pollution and are not usually present in polluted streams. A high population of these organisms would indicate good water quality. Conversely, many midge larvae and aquatic worms can tolerate higher levels of pollution and are often found in impacted waterways.



caddisfly larvae



silk case

Striking a Balance

Nature-Based Tourism: A Walk on the Wild Side

by John Tibbetts, SC Sea Grant Consortium

Around the globe, a growing number of tourists are climbing mountains in Nepal and Colorado, visiting sites of ancient civilizations in Thailand and New Mexico, and paddling down rivers in Brazil and the Carolinas. These "alternative travelers" are part of a tourism niche expanding by 10 to 15 percent a year worldwide.

Some tourists want adventures in remote spots; others want day trips in natural areas near cities. But most agree the best tours teach visitors about local wildlife and history. Nature-based tourism, which includes ecotourism, historic tourism, and hunting and sport fishing, is growing rapidly along South Carolina's coast. Tours of harbors and inland waters are already popular near Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Hilton Head Island.

Now, through organizations such as the ACE Basin Economic Forum, Lowcountry leaders are working on a plan to draw more travelers to the coast's undeveloped rural areas, to its plantations, blackwater rivers, salt marshes, and forests. But local leaders worry that if fragile areas like the ACE Basin bring in visitors too quickly, these resources could be overwhelmed. "The ACE Basin can stand only so many tourists," says Charles Griffith, county supervisor for Colleton County. "When you have motor boats running the rivers,

you can ruin them. Some national parks have been destroyed by too many visitors."

Colleton County residents will face challenges in managing development as the ACE Basin becomes better marketed and known. Already conflict exists over who can use the area and which uses are best. For example, paddle sports are becoming popular on the Edisto River. During the summer of 1990, before the state designated a portion of the waterway as the Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Trail, only about 200 paddlers rode the river, according to estimates by state park officials and Charles Sweat of the Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Trail Commission. After the trail was marketed regionally, visitorship shot up during the summer of 1995 to about 4,000 paddlers.

Yet the river is also increasingly popular with jet skiers and traditional users such as fishermen in motor boats. "We've already got landings on the Edisto River where paddlers, motor boats, and jet skis are fighting for space," says Sweat.

Meanwhile, there is no limit on the number of tour operators that can pile canoes into the river. Four operators and several nonprofit groups use the Edisto, but they can all show up at the same boat landing at the same time, potentially ruining the experience for visitors.

Clearly, a limited number of people can visit an area before that region's health and character are altered. So communities and tour operators must work together and plan carefully if nature travel is to be sustainable. There are many questions to consider: How many people can visit? Is there, for example, only one boat landing in a popular area, and is it already crowded with visitors on weekends? How many more visitors can the area's infrastructure support? As areas become more popular, should access be controlled? Are resource managers ready to manage more people?

In South Carolina, several groups are looking at these questions including the SC Nature-Based Tourism Association, the ACE Basin Economic Forum, the SC Professional Paddlesport Association, the SC Department of Natural Resources, and the SC Sea Grant Consortium.

These groups are looking to strike a balance so communities can use natural resources for their economic benefit while conserving them for the future. ■

This article was excerpted from the Winter 1995-96 edition of Coastal Heritage, a quarterly publication of the SC Sea Grant Consortium.

Field Trip

Blue Hole: The Perfect Autumn Hike

by David Hedden, US Forest Service

Blue Hole is a deep, aquamarine pool at the base of a secluded waterfall on Cedar Creek, a tributary to the Chauga River in Oconee County. Surrounded by dense thickets of punktatum and mountain laurel, Blue Hole offers unusual serenity and a feeling of isolation in a relatively easy-to-reach location. An autumn visit will reward the hiker with excellent vistas of changing hardwood foliage in addition to the splendor of Blue Hole.

The waterfall cascading into Blue Hole is about twenty to thirty feet tall with a unique bend that gives the illusion of a taller waterfall. Visitors can view the falls from the base or take a short side trip to the top of the falls.

To find Blue Hole, travel to the Andrew Pickens Ranger District of the Sumter National Forest.

The ranger station is about six miles west of Walhalla on Highway 28. Travel about a half mile past the station and turn left onto Whetstone Road. Go about a mile and turn left on Cassidy Bridge Road. After another mile, turn left onto Forest Service Road 744. Then, travel approximately two miles before turning right onto Forest Service Road 744C. Just before the end of this road, a primitive road turns off to the right. Four wheel drives are required beyond this point; however, it is only a short walk from here to Blue Hole. About one-quarter of a mile down this road, take the first road to the right and follow it to Cedar Creek for a look at Blue Hole from the top of the falls. To get to the bottom, go past this road and follow an unmaintained trail out the ridge. Continue down the trail to the stream, and bushwhack upstream to the base of the falls.

Re-visit Blue Hole in the springtime and see migrating neo-tropical birds. If you come in the summer, look closely along the roadside for smooth purple coneflower. Regardless of the season, visitors to Blue Hole will be rewarded with a variety of scenic and interesting sights! ■



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River Currents

The **South Carolina Department of Transportation** purchased 7,661 acres of forested wetlands on the **Waccamaw River** from **Georgia Pacific Corporation** for conservation purposes in June 1996. **The Trust for Public Land**, a national nonprofit conservation organization based in Atlanta, established the Winyah Bay Mitigation Fund and contributed over \$120,000 from the fund toward the purchase of this land. The acquisition is the first of two purchases which will provide lands to be used by DOT to offset the loss of wetlands that may occur with future highway projects in coastal South Carolina.

On June 26, 1996, **The Trust for Public Land** conveyed 367 acres of land in the **Chattooga River watershed** to the **US Forest Service**. The acquisition was a top priority for the Forest Service in its efforts to protect the water quality of the **Chattooga National Wild and Scenic River**. Located in **Oconee County**, the property was formerly part of a large apple orchard. **The Trust for Public Land** purchased the tract from a private party who had removed the apple trees and cleared the property in anticipation of development.

Canoeing for Kids raised over \$28,000 for children's charities with their May canoe-a-thon on the Saluda River. Nearly 350 paddlers participated in this event. **The Lowcountry Canoe-a-thon** was held October 5th on the Ashley

River in Charleston. Participants were treated to a scenic float through wetlands to Middleton Place followed by an oyster roast with live entertainment and free camping!

South Carolina's citizens are teaming up to help control litter at public boat landings through the new **Adopt-a-Landing program** sponsored by **SC DNR**. The official kick-off for the program was held on June 15, 1996 on the Saluda River in Columbia. Leon Gyles, President of the **Saluda River Chapter of Trout Unlimited**, challenged other groups to take part in this volunteer program. Since that time, several groups have stepped up to his challenge including **Adventure Carolina, Blackwater Expeditions, Coastal Expeditions, SC Wildlife Magazine, Christian Hendricks and family, and the Five Rivers Coalition**. For more information on Adopt-a-Landing, contact Ellis Farr at (803) 737-0800.

Residents and concerned citizens from the **ACE Basin**, the region formed by the confluence of the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto rivers, have taken on the challenge of expanding the region's economic opportunities without undermining its natural and cultural assets. The **ACE Basin Economic Forum**, comprised of more than 100 Colleton County residents, has worked over the past year to develop a plan for compatible development which they believe will foster job creation and business development while protecting the area's unique natural resources and way of life. In July of this year, the

Forum released its final report, *ACE Basin Economic Forum: An Action Agenda for Compatible Economic Development*. In addition to providing an overview of the region's ecological and economic health, the 32-page report details a number of strategies for the region to meet its economic and environmental goals. Information about this project can be obtained by writing to ACE Basin Economic Forum, PO Box 165, Walterboro, SC 29488.

American Rivers, Inc. recently released its 11th annual report on the most threatened rivers in North America. The nonprofit organization says that rivers face significant threats from legislation, mines, dams, pollution, flood control projects, and other alteration. The **10 most endangered rivers** are 1) Clarks Fork of the Yellowstone River (Montana, Wyoming); 2) American River (California); 3) Upper Chattahoochee and Etowah rivers (Georgia); 4) Missouri River (Midwestern US); 5) Upper Hudson River (New York); 6) Columbia/Snake river systems (Washington, Oregon, and Idaho); 7) Elk River (Oregon); 8) Pinto Creek (Arizona); 9) Penobscot River (Maine); and 10) Animas River (Colorado, New Mexico).

Do **YOU** know of any river-related news or upcoming events? If so, send a short description to Becky Rideout for inclusion in **River Currents** or call (803) 737-0800.



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